



Minong Ridgeline and Historic Mine Workings, 1892

Name of Property:	Minong Copper Mining District
City, State:	Isle Royale National Park, Michigan
Significant Dates:	ca. 4,500 BCE – ca. 1890 CE; ca. 1841-1900
NHL Criteria:	1, 6
NHL Theme(s):	I. Peopling Places V. Developing the American Economy VI. Expanding Science and technology VII. Transforming the Environment
Previous Recognition:	1977 Minong Mine Historic District
National Historic Context:	I. Cultural Developments: Indigenous American Populations A. The Earliest Inhabitants 1. The Early Peopling of North America C. Prehistoric Archeology: Topical Facets 4. Prehistoric Technology 22. Major Contributions to the Development of the Science of Archeology XVIII. Technology (Engineering and Invention) F. Extraction and Conversion of Industrial Raw Materials
NHL Significance:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Minong Copper Mining District meets Criterion 1 and 6 for a National Historic Landmark nomination under four thematic frameworks: <i>Developing the American</i>



Economy, Expanding Science and Technology, and Transforming the Environment, and Peopling Places. The Minong Copper Mining District is an exceptional example of Isle Royale's contribution to regional copper mining traditions that attained national and eventually global significance and incorporates both precontact and historic phases.

- Some 9,000 years of precontact and historic copper mining activity have left an indelible mark on the landscape of the Minong Copper Mining District and fall under the theme *Transforming the Environment*. The site combines one of the largest, best preserved precontact copper mining landscapes with the well-preserved remains of the largest historic copper mining operation on Isle Royale.
- Under Criterion 6, *Peopling Places* is represented by the evidence of precontact patterns of migration to and from Isle Royale. Under the theme of *Expanding Science and Technology*, Minong Copper Mine is significant for its extensive record of copper mining in the Lake Superior basin, one of the oldest examples of human metals exploitation on earth. Native copper obtained from the mines in the region formed the basis of a copper tool and ornament making tradition beginning as early as the Paleoindian period and extending through the seventeenth century.
- Under Criterion 1, the global impact of the region's native copper industry during the period the Minong Mining Company was in active operation speaks to the theme *Developing the American Economy* under the topics of extraction and production, distribution and consumption, transportation and communication, and workers and work culture. Beginning in the 1840s, American miners used precontact mining remains found on Isle Royale and Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula as a key guide to establishing a native copper mining industry that by 1870 was producing the majority of the world's copper.
- The precontact copper mining pit concentration (20IR24) within the Minong Copper Mining District is one of the largest ever found and is by far the most thoroughly studied. The Minong Copper Mining District figured prominently in a number of early archaeological investigations, contributing to the development of archaeological science with respect to understandings of precontact copper mining. Much of our modern archaeological knowledge of precontact native copper mining methods stems from field research undertaken at 20IR24. Finally, the Minong Copper Mining District enjoys the protection of both National Park and Wilderness status, ensuring that it will retain its high level of integrity indefinitely.

Integrity:

Both the precontact and historic components of the Minong Copper Mining District retain a high overall degree of archaeological integrity. Relatively few precontact native copper mines are known, and all are found in the Lake Superior basin. The precontact mines on Minong Ridge may be the largest such concentration. The remoteness of Isle Royale limited historic activity at Minong Ridge; thus, most historical disturbance of the site resulted from the historic mining



efforts of the late 1870s through the early 1880s. While it is clear that the Minong Mining Company deliberately located its operation within the densest concentration of precontact pits, the overall number of pits disturbed by historic mining activity appears to be small in proportion to the total number present on the landscape today. All of the major components of the Minong Mining Company's operation remain extant in the form of ruins that confer a high degree of integrity of setting and association as the precontact and historic remains are clearly juxtaposed on the landscape. More important, the wilderness status of Isle Royale National Park, coupled with relatively low visitor traffic, greatly reduces the likelihood of disturbance to the Minong Copper Mining District and will serve to maintain the site's high integrity for the foreseeable future.

Owner of Property: Isle Royale National Park (U.S. National Park Service)

Acreage of Property: 211.5 acres

Origins of Nomination: Isle Royale National Park

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: High

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: Low

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of September 9, 2020):

- Elizabeth Valencia, Acting Superintendent, Isle Royale National Park (owner) – 8/18/2020

National Historic Landmarks Committee Comments:

- The National Historic Landmarks Committee had no substantive comments or corrections.

National Historic Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of the Minong Copper Mining District in Isle Royale National Park, Keweenaw County, Michigan, as a National Historic Landmark, with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

Advisory Board Recommendation: